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Sign of Hope Seen in House for Immigration Overhaul

By [ASHLEY PARKER](#)

WASHINGTON — As House Republicans took a tentative step forward on an [immigration](#) overhaul this week and raised the possibility of citizenship for those brought to the United States illegally as young children, immigration advocates found themselves pondering a new question: Is the potential concession as far as many House Republicans are willing to go, or are they slowly inching their way toward a broader compromise?

“It’s a good first step — provided it is just a first step,” said Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York and an author of the immigration bill that passed the Senate last month.

Just where House Republicans stand on a pathway to citizenship for all of the 11 million undocumented immigrants already in the country remains to be determined. But on Tuesday, the House Judiciary Committee took up the question in a subcommittee hearing, with both Democrats and Republicans expressing optimism that they could support some form of citizenship for young adults known as “Dreamers,” who were brought across the border as children.

“Simply put, children who were brought here haven’t committed a crime, misdemeanor or otherwise,” said Representative Trey Gowdy, the South Carolina Republican who leads the Immigration and Border Security Subcommittee. “The adults may have, but the children have not.”

House Republicans have largely rejected the overhaul of immigration laws recently passed by the Senate, instead opting for a piecemeal approach of several smaller, but related, immigration bills. But Tuesday’s hearing showed that House Republicans were open to at least some possibility of legalization or citizenship.

“The most optimistic interpretation is that leading House Republicans are testing the waters in hopes they can bring enough of their caucus along to get to a more conservative approach to a broad bill — one that would include legalization of the 11 million, with a citizenship option for many,” said Frank Sharry, the executive director of [America’s Voice](#), a pro-immigration group. “A more cynical take is that they are trying to position themselves to win the blame game.”

Representative Eric Cantor of Virginia, the No. 2 House Republican, and Representative Robert W. Goodlatte, his fellow Virginia Republican who leads the House Judiciary Committee, are working on legislation, known as the Kids Act, which would probably provide a path to

legalization for the Dreamers. Both legislators voted in 2010 against the Dream Act, legislation that would have led to citizenship.

Tuesday's hearing was briefly overshadowed by comments made in a recent interview by Representative Steve King, Republican of Iowa and an outspoken opponent of an immigration overhaul. He told a conservative Web site that while some Dreamers were "valedictorians," other undocumented immigrants had "calves the size of cantaloupes because they're hauling 75 pounds of marijuana across the desert."

On Wednesday, Representative Raúl Labrador, Republican of Idaho, called Mr. King's comments "out of touch" with House Republicans. He also chastised the news media, saying they were making too much of "one person making a reprehensible and irresponsible comment."

House Democrats remain divided on their strategy. Some are hesitant to support any bill that does not include a broad path to citizenship for more than just the younger immigrants. Many Dreamers rejected any Republican bill for their group, arguing that they would not accept anything that stopped short of citizenship for the 11 million, which includes many of their parents.

"We are determined to win citizenship, not only for Dreamers, not only for immigration youth, but for all of the undocumented," Cristina Jiménez, the managing director of United We Dream, said in a conference call Monday.

Other Democrats see the path for Dreamers as a positive step, and a signal that House Republicans might be willing to go even further in eventual negotiations with the Senate. For similar reasons, some House Republicans are hesitant to support any immigration bill, worried that it could serve as a Trojan horse that would lead to, in the words of Mr. Labrador, "having the Senate bill jammed down our throats."

While many House Republicans have been hesitant to support full citizenship for those who have come to the country illegally, some now seem willing to consider legalization for the undocumented immigrants already here.

Representative Steve Pearce, a New Mexico Republican who represents a district that borders Mexico, on Wednesday relayed the message he is hearing back home.

"If there are jobs for those people, then fine, let's give them legal status, let's let them work," he said. "But not the citizenship, because that's going to take benefits away from my family."

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